

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 2162

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, PINT, PBOR, BG, BM

SUBJ: BANGLADESH PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO BURMA

1. SUMMARYC BANGLADESH PRESIDENT ZIA'S FOUR-DAY STATE VISIT TO BURMA WAS MARKED BY OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OF FRIENDSHIP AND UNDERSTANDING. THE VISIT SEEMS TO HAVE GONE OFF WELL, BUT A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS WHICH WERE DISCUSSED PRIVATELY, PARTICULARLY THE ISSUES OF ILLEGAL BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN BURMA AND TREATMENTS OF MUSLIMS IN BURMA, WERE NOT RESOLVED. AN APPARENT GUB ATTEMPT TO QUASH RUMORS OF A RIFT BETWEEN GENERAL SAN YU AND PRESIDENT NE WIN BY HAVING SAN YU HOST A DINNER FOR ZIA DID NOT SUCCEED. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS ISSUED IN CONNECTION WITH THE VISIT -- TOASTS BY BOTH PRESIDENTS AT TWO STATE BANQUETS AND THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE -- THE "FRUITFUL" VISIT AND "CORDIAL" TALKS FORGED NEW LINKS OF BURMA/BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP, UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION. THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE (FULL TEXT BEING POUCHED TO DEPARTMENTANDDACCA) STATED THE TWO PRESIDENTS HELD FRANK AND FRIENDLY DISCUSSIONS IN A CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE; THE PRESIDENT OF BANGLADESH OUTLINED HIS NATION'S FOREIGN POLICY; BOTH SIDES WERE CONVINCED THAT RELATIONS WOULD BE STRENGTHENED AS A RESULT OF THE VISIT; AND THE BANGLADESH PRESIDENT EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO PRESIDENT NE WIN TO VISIT BANGLADESH WHICH
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WAS ACCEPTED WITH PLEASURE. (GUB SOURCES SAID THE VISIT MAY TAKE PLACE LATE THIS YEAR OR EARLY 1978.) OTHER SUBSTANTIVE DECISIONS ANNOUNCED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE VISIT STATED THAT BURMA WILL SELL 100,000 TONS OF RICE TO BANGLADESH, WITH SHIPMENTS TO BEGIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; AND A BURMESE DELEGATION WILL VISIT DACCA NEXT MONTH TO SIGN AN AIR AGREEMENT.

3. ACCORDING TO GUB MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS, TALKS ON TRADE AND BOUNDARY MATTERS WENT SMOOTHLY, AND THE MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUE WAS NOT DISCUSSED IN ANY GREAT DETAIL. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS LEARNED THAT SOME PROBLEMS DID ARISE DURING DISCUSSIONS BOTH BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENTS AND BETWEEN LOWER RANKING OFFICIALS OF THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. ONE PARTICULARLY THORNY PROBLEM WAS THE ISSUE OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION BY BANGLADESH NATIONALS INTO BURMA. ACCORDING TO A PRESS SOURCE, THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE WAS DELAYED BECAUSE THE BURMESE WANTED SOME MENTION OF THIS TO APPEAR IN THE STATEMENT BUT THE BANGLADESH DELEGATION INSISTED THAT IT BE OMITTED. RELIABLE DIPLOMATS IN RANGOON TOLD USDAO THAT ZIA AND NE WIN DEVOTED A LARGE SHARE OF THEIR DISCUSSIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF MUSLIMS RESIDING ALONG THE JOINT BORDER. ZIA SAID THAT BANGLADESH WOULD NOT INTERFERE IN INTERNAL BURMESE AFFAIRS BUT WOULD BE CONCERNED IF MUSLIMS IN BURMA WERE BADLY TREATED. USDAO HEARD UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT BOTH GOVERNMENTS EXPRESS-

ED CONCERN ABOUT INDIAN INFLUENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. USDAO ALSO HEARD FROM ANOTHER DIPLOMATIC SOURCE THAT NE WIN "TALKED DOWN" TO ZIA DURING THEIR CONVERSATIONS, TREATING HIM AS A NEWCOMER TO HIGH AFFAIRS OF STATE. FURTHER, ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, GENERAL SAN YU FAILED TO IMPRESS THE BANGLADESH DELEGATION; THEY CAME TO REGARD HIM AS "SEEMING STUPID."

4. COMMENT: THE VISIT PROBABLY WENT OFF AS WELL AS COULD BE EXPECTED. THE BURMESE, WHILE PLAYING THE PART OF GOOD CONFIDENTIAL

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HOSTS, DID NOT ACCORD ANY SPECIAL TREATMENT TO ZIA AND PARTY BEYOND THAT NORMALLY EXTENDED TO A VISITING HEAD OF STATE. FROM THE BURMESE POINT OF VIEW THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH IS PERHAPS THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE GUB CLAIMS THERE ARE OVER 75,000 BANGLADESH CITIZENS ILLEGALLY RESIDING IN BURMA. A HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL FROM THE GUB MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND FINANCE TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HE IS MORE WORRIED ABOUT AN INFLUX OF IMMIGRANTS FROM AMONG THE 80 MILLION BANGLADESHIS ON BURMA'S WESTERN FRONTIER THAN FROM AMONG THE 800 MILLION CHINESE IN THE NORTH. OTHER GUB OFFICIALS WHO OVERHEARD THE REMARK WERE QUICK TO AGREE WITH THE SENTIMENT. THESE EXTERNAL POPULATION PRESSURES ARE OFTEN CITED BY GUB OFFICIALS AS A MAJOR REASON WHY BURMA SHOULD NOT INTRODUCE A FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM.

5. ONE ASPECT OF THE VISIT SEEMED MORE RELEVANT TO BURMA'S INTERNAL POLITICS THAN TO BURMA/BANGLADESH RELATIONS. THIS CONCERNED A DINNER FOR PRESIDENT ZIA HOSTED BY GENERAL SAN YU, SECRETARY OF THE BURMA SOCIALIST PROGRAM PARTY AND NE WIN'S HEIR APPARENT. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME SAN YU HAD HOSTED A DINNER FOR A VISITING HEAD OF STATE WHILE NE WIN WAS IN THE

COUNTRY. DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES IN RANGOON INTERPRETED THIS AS AN ATTEMPT TO QUASH RECENT RUMORS OF A RIFT BETWEEN SAN YU AND NE WIN; HOWEVER, BURMESE SOURCES CLAIM NE WIN ALWAYS BESTOWS SOME SPECIAL HONOR OR DUTY UPON HIS UNDERLINGS JUST BEFORE HE FIRES THEM, AND THE RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE UNABATED.

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